

Can we balance our economic needs against a long-term climate catastrophe?

Published in the Palo Alto Weekly

December 18, 2009

Climate change is one of the most serious issues facing our nation and our planet. Today we are at a key juncture of the climate change debate in the United States and internationally, both through the Copenhagen conference and generally as a turning point in time.

Given the economic crises we face, some say it would be better to walk away from this tremendous challenge now. But communities here and abroad expect leaders to rise to the challenge and do what's necessary to create a clean-energy foundation for generations to come.

The people of Silicon Valley understand what we're facing. Silicon Valley is where innovation is a way of life, and caring about our environment is not a political issue but a basic value.

We are alarmed at the damage being inflicted on our planet by greenhouse gases, alarmed by the growing threat of global warming and climate change on communities around the world, and alarmed by the threat to our own domestic tranquility caused by our reliance on fossil fuels and foreign oil supplies.

Climate change is undeniably and inextricably linked to the security interests of our nation. Last year, as chair of the House Intelligence Community Management Subcommittee, I held a joint hearing with Chairman Ed Markey's House Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming. The hearing was on the national-security implications of global climate change.

From the testimony at this hearing it became clear that climate change could seriously threaten our national security as well as our allies' security by exacerbating existing global problems such as droughts, resource shortages and extreme-weather events.

The United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen presents an important opportunity to take global leadership in the fight against climate change. The recent Environmental Protection Agency's "endangerment" finding, classifying greenhouse gases as a public-health danger, is a caution against inaction and makes clear the U.S. government's intention to engage on this matter.

On May 28 the House Energy and Commerce Committee, of which I'm a senior member, passed H.R. 2454, the American Clean Energy and Security Act. This legislation represents an historic effort to shape a new energy future for our country, to move the U.S. into a leadership position to address global climate change, and finally break our addiction to fossil fuels and advance alternative sources of energy here at home.

The American Clean Energy and Security Act guarantees an investment of \$190 billion in new, clean energy technologies and energy efficiency which will create jobs and spur new industries. I worked tirelessly with the House leadership, as well as chairmen Henry Waxman and Markey to see that this legislation passed the U.S. House of Representatives on June 26.

There must be decisive action on this issue, domestically and internationally. The consequences of "business as usual" are too great, and the price to the global environment, economy and human welfare is too high to delay any longer.

In Silicon Valley, we understand not only the danger of climate change but also the economic opportunity it presents.

Our nation can and should be the number-one leader in reducing greenhouse-gas emissions, developing green technologies and protecting our planet for future generations. While the course may not be easy, our opportunities are vast and the cost of inaction catastrophic.